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Teachers' Training, Knowledge and Attitudes toward Mainstreaming Behaviorally Disordered Students in Regular Classrooms

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TEACHERS' TRAINING, KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MAINSTREAMING BEHAVIORALLY DISORDERED STUDENTS IN REGULAR CLASSROOMS

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Public Law 94-142 requires that special education students be placed in "the least restrictive school environment" possible and that teachers who work with special needs students in regular classrooms receive training and help from special educators. Lefrancois (1988) maintained that although *mainstreaming* is mandated by law it is still highly controversial. According to Vandivier & Vandivier (1981), teachers have reservations about including children with "particular types" of disabilities in regular classes, and Mooney & Algozzine (1978) reported that teachers consider "socially defiant" behaviors to be more disturbing than those associated with learning disabilities.

This study was designed to determine the relationship between experienced classroom teachers' willingness to accept behaviorally disordered (BD) students in regular classrooms and their knowledge of effective and ineffective intervention strategies for mainstreaming them. Twenty experienced, regular classroom teachers from three central Illinois elementary schools volunteered to complete a survey. Knowledge scores were determined by assessing respondents' ability to accurately identify effective and ineffective strategies as described by Duquette & O'Reilly (1988), Fagen & Hill (1977), Knoff (1985), Long, Morse & Newman (1976), and Wells (1983). Training in special education and experience with BD students were also assessed.

The hypothesis that teachers' willingness to mainstream would correlate positively with knowledge of effective intervention strategies was not statistically supported ($Chi\text{-}Square = 3.838, df = 2, p < .146$). However, of the 8 teachers willing to mainstream, 6 had high knowledge scores. Other findings included: 1) the more behaviorally disordered students teachers had taught in the past 5 years, the more willing they were to mainstream ($Chi\text{-}Square = 13.4, df = 6, p < .05$); 2) of the 5 teachers who had mainstreamed 11 or more BD students in the past 5 years, 4 had high knowledge scores; 3) teachers were not accurate when assessing their own knowledge level; 4) nearly half (9 out of 20) of the teachers had no courses or in-service training which addressed the needs of BD students; and 5) only 3 out of 20 teachers in the study, 15%, were knowledgeable, willing to mainstream BD students if given a choice, and, in fact, had mainstreamed 11 or more BD students in the past 5 years.

This pilot study leads to the following concern: Will school districts be forced to group and segregate the increasing numbers of BD students because regular classroom teachers are not prepared to work effectively with them?